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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of eighteen members of the Human Rights Council

Letter dated 13 June 2012 from the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

It is my honour to inform you that the Government of Estonia has decided to present its candidature to the Human Rights Council for the period 2013-2015 for one of the seats allocated to the Eastern European States at the elections to be held in 2012.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006, please find attached a statement of the voluntary pledges of Estonia expressing our commitment to and active engagement in the protection and promotion of human rights (see annex).

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Margus **Kolga**
Ambassador

* A/67/50.

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Annex to the letter dated 13 June 2012 from the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Candidature of Estonia to the Human Rights Council, 2013-2015

Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251

1. The promotion and protection of human rights is a national priority of Estonia and an integral part of its foreign policy. Its international efforts are aimed at strengthening security, development and human rights in the world. As part of those efforts, Estonia is presenting its candidature to the Human Rights Council for the period 2013-2015 in order to more actively contribute to the Council's work for the promotion of human rights.

2. Estonia supports the human rights institutions of the United Nations and the integration of human rights in all United Nations activities. It believes that the Human Rights Council represents the goal of United Nations Member States to advance the protection of human rights and is fully committed to ensuring the effectiveness of the Council, which would lead to the tangible improvement of human rights across the world. Estonia pledges to work with all Council members in an open, constructive and cross-regional manner to achieve that goal, and believes that the Council should be able not only to respond, in a timely and responsible manner, to all urgent human rights questions, but also to advance and develop universal human rights issues.

3. Estonia cooperates with and supports the bodies and mechanisms of the Human Rights Council. It will continue to support the functioning of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and has issued a standing invitation to all special procedures mandate holders. It will work to enhance dialogue with the special procedures mandate holders with a view to discussing and disseminating their work. Estonia advocates the promotion of an open dialogue with civil society that contributes to the advancement of human rights, based on its experience in working in cooperation with civil society on policy formulation and implementation.

4. Estonia highly values the role of the United Nations as a multilateral forum for the promotion of peace and security, development and human rights. It has actively contributed to the work of all United Nations bodies, including through its membership in the Economic and Social Council (2009-2011), the Commission on the Status of Women (2011-2014), the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2010-2012), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) (2011-2012). Estonia has played an active role, including by strengthening cooperation in humanitarian affairs during its Vice-Presidency of the Economic and Social Council in 2009 and through its role as a co-facilitator of the intergovernmental negotiations in 2010 that led to the establishment of UN-Women.

International contribution

Adherence to human rights instruments

5. Estonia had already acceded to 11 United Nations human rights instruments before the entry into force of its Constitution in 1992. To date, Estonia has acceded to most of the international and regional human rights agreements, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

6. Estonia regularly submits reports on its implementation of the conventions. In 2010 Estonia presented its reports on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and on the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In 2011 it presented its reports on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Cooperation with special procedures

7. Estonia has issued a standing invitation to all the special procedures mandate holders and has received visits from the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (2007) and the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2008). Estonia has also recognized the competence of the Human Rights Committee and, recently, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to receive and hear individual complaints. Estonia is also considering recognizing the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

8. Estonia pledges to continue to submit regular reports on its implementation of the human rights instruments and to maintain and promote the system for distributing the conclusions and recommendations made by the treaty bodies and special procedures to the relevant authorities, non-governmental organizations and the general public in Estonia.

Universal periodic review

9. The human rights situation in Estonia was examined in the framework of the universal periodic review in 2011, and Estonia has undertaken a coordinated effort to implement the recommendations and voluntary commitments that it has accepted within the framework of the review. Estonia considers the universal periodic review a unique process by its terms and by its aim to improve the human rights situation throughout the world, and will continue to be actively involved in the universal periodic review debates.

Contribution to international initiatives for the promotion and protection of human rights

10. Through regular voluntary donations made within multilateral development cooperation, Estonia has since 1998 provided support to an increasing number of United Nations funds and programmes aimed at protecting human rights, including promoting the situation and rights of women and girls, including OHCHR, UNICEF, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)/UN-Women and the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative. Estonia started that contribution as soon as economic conditions after its independence made it possible, and has continued it throughout the recent economic crisis.

11. In addition, Estonia has provided consistent support in the field of humanitarian assistance to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In addition to regular donations, Estonia has made targeted contributions in support of victims of specific humanitarian crises, focusing on the most vulnerable groups, including women and children.

12. Under the development cooperation and humanitarian assistance strategy of Estonia for the period 2011-2015, one of the goals of the country's development cooperation is supporting human development and increasing the availability of education and health care in developing countries, focusing on women and children. In accordance with its strategy, Estonia aims to improve the situation of women and children living in poverty in developing countries through its bilateral development activities, mainly in priority partner countries, such as Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

13. Estonia will continue to provide contributions for activities aimed at the promotion and protection of human rights, including contributions to the United Nations funds supporting the development and the promotion of the situation of indigenous peoples and facilitating the participation of the representatives of indigenous peoples in United Nations discussions (the Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations).

Cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other United Nations human rights agencies, programmes and initiatives

14. Estonia will maintain its annual contribution to support the activities of OHCHR and will continue its cooperation with the Office.

Women's rights

15. Estonia actively participates in the United Nations intergovernmental discussions on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on the Status of Women, being a full member of the latter from 2011 to 2014. From 2007 to 2009, Estonia held the chairmanship of the Consultative Committee on the United Nations Development Fund for Women and, as one of the co-facilitators, led the negotiations on the United Nations system-wide coherence

reform in 2009 and 2010, which resulted in an agreement on the creation of UN-Women.

16. Estonia supports the principles and the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security. It adopted a national action plan for the implementation of the resolution aimed at advancing and systematizing efforts to promote the situation and participation of women in the country's activities relating to conflict management and its peacebuilding efforts.

Commitments through regional organizations

17. Estonia is a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Council of Europe and the European Union and participates actively in the human rights-related activities of those organizations, placing special emphasis on the rights of women.

National contribution, pledges and commitments

18. The generally recognized principles and rules of international law, including those pertaining to human rights, are an inseparable part of the Estonian legal system. International agreements are directly incorporated into domestic law by ratification. Fundamental rights scrutiny is carried out throughout the legislative process, and any legal act not consistent with the duties arising from a ratified international agreement cannot be applied and may be declared invalid by the Supreme Court.

19. In accordance with the Constitution, the Chancellor of Justice is an independent official who reviews legislation of the legislative and executive powers and local authorities for conformity with the Constitution and the laws. An important function of the Chancellor of Justice is to act as an ombudsman. On that basis, the Chancellor must monitor whether State agencies comply with the principle of guaranteeing fundamental rights and freedoms and the principle of good administration. Since 2007, the Chancellor also functions as the national preventive mechanism established under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and, since February 2011, as Children's Ombudsman pursuant to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Government of Estonia will continue to provide support to and cooperate with the Office of the Chancellor of Justice with a view to ensuring its full compliance with the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles).

20. Under the Equal Treatment Act and the Gender Equality Act, the Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment receives applications from individuals and expresses his or her opinion on possible cases of discrimination. The Commissioner also assists individuals with submissions of complaints concerning discrimination. Another task of the Commissioner is to introduce and promote the principle of equal treatment among the general public. Finding additional financial resources for this is one of the main obligations of Estonia in further developing the institution of the Commissioner.

21. Estonia will step up its efforts in the area of equal treatment and gender equality, especially with regard to the rights of women, and in improving the guarantees in the administration of justice, first and foremost by reducing the length of judicial proceedings and improving the compensation mechanisms in case of errors made in the administration of justice.

22. Over the years Estonia has adopted close to 70 national strategies and development plans, most of which also address the implementation of human rights. The Development Plan for Reducing Violence for 2010-2014, including measures to combat trafficking in human beings; the Estonian integration programme for 2008-2013, which supports the principle of equal treatment; the Civil Society Development Plan for 2011-2014; and the Development Plan for Children and Families, currently elaborated, are just some of them. Estonia will continue to implement and develop State strategies and action plans with special emphasis on the protection and promotion of human rights.

23. Various interest groups are consulted in drafting development plans and strategies. In 2005, the Government, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, drew up a document on good practices on involvement. The purpose of involvement is to improve the quality of decisions and their social legitimacy by involving non-governmental organizations and the private and public sectors in the decision-making process: a government agency or a non-governmental or representative organization drafting a document should involve all stakeholders in the decision-making, thus helping to ensure balance and the consideration of public interests. The Government initiative is on the way to making the use of an Internet forum for such consultations a compulsory part of the elaboration of any Government legislative proposal. Thus, the Government of Estonia pledges to continue dialogue and further enhance cooperation with civil society.

24. Estonia will start preparations for the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and is considering the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention against Discrimination in Education.